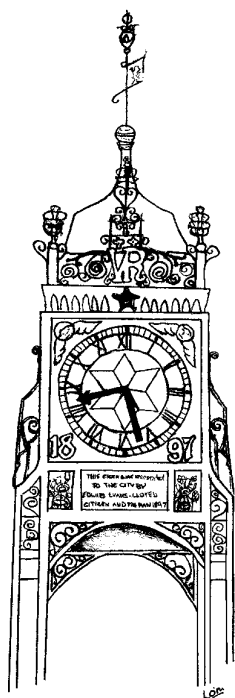


Chester chronicles



EASTGATE CLOCK, CHESTER

At last I've been awarded the BTA!*

What! You mean you've never been to America? At your age? And you an Irish doctor, no less. Oh, I know, I know, it's a terrible shameful admission to have to make but this is actually my first time in America. You know, that's probably why I never got a consultant job in Ireland—because I didn't have the BTA. It is regarded as an essential prerequisite. The other minor degrees, like FRCS and MRCP, are just mere icing on the cake compared with the BTA.

As a young doctor, I remember all my mates heading off to America for their BTA degree and they all ended up with consultant jobs in Ireland, though what illegally washing dishes in a New York diner had to do with the skills required for a consultant post in Ireland was beyond me. Mind you, the way the NHS is heading here, it's a skill that might soon be required!

Anyway, there I was, at the MSSVD Conference in Baltimore, drinking Bud at the Hard Rock Cafe overlooking the harbour, fondly reminiscing on the previous day's sight seeing in New York. Ellis Island had been an absolute must. What a splendid, poignant, yet powerful, memorial to the millions from all over the world who had made it through to America. People who had painfully left their homes through absolute desperation looking for hope in the New World. Despite the desperation, the wit and humour shines through and I thought the comment on one of the photos attributed to one young man summarised the wry humour and spirit of the New America. "Go to America where the streets are paved with gold; I was told. However, when I got there, there was no gold. Indeed, the streets weren't even paved, and worse still, I was the one that was expected to pave them."

It wasn't all fun you know, Baltimore—it's not called Crab City for nothing. I discovered to my horror that most of the food we were expected to eat had come from the sea. Now as an Irish Catholic, I associated fish with penance food on Fridays. I can just about

tolerate tinned salmon but I think I've even gone off that now, having sat beside people dismembering the biggest lobsters I've ever seen and hammering, chiselling, and cutting up crabs with great skill and dexterity. Luckily there were still some hamburgers to be had.

I had sent in an abstract, more in desperation than in hope. It didn't mention the key words like locus, mutation, gag, resistance, reverse transcriptase, viral kinetics, genotypic, or phenotypic but the word internet appeared somewhere in the abstract and I am sure that's what did it. Anyway, I had finally got the abstract sorted despite the best efforts of the president of the MSSVD, Dr George Kinghorn, to scupper my project, by his wanton dissemination of the pornographic Melissa virus. Luckily, our computer department spotted his first email to me as being superinfected and warned me to contact trace him and get himself sorted. None the less, my presentation went down rather well despite some disquiet from the chairman, Dr Simon Barton, accusing me of not sticking to the point. I hadn't realised how successful my presentation had been until I was awarded the prize of £1000 by the conference organiser, Dr Jonathan Zenilman for presenting the abstract that "made the scientists most content." Some colleagues, (jealous no doubt!) are adamant that he said that it was the abstract with "the least scientific content" but that's just sour grapes. Mind you, when I went up to collect the cheque for £1000, he gave me a box of 1000 pens and as each day passes with no sign of the cheque in the post, I am beginning to wonder if my hearing was a little impaired that night after all.

You may as well ask "does the Pope have a balcony?" as ask me if I'll be going back to America. There's lots more dishes to be washed yet!

COLM O'MAHONY

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*Been to America.